



**Analysing Representations of
the Comfort Women Issue**

Gender, Race, Nation and Subjectivities

by

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or tertiary institution and , to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Aiko Yoshioka

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Preface

Since the early 1990s I have witnessed the growing awareness of the comfort women issue in Japan. Since I came to Australia to study feminism in 1995, I have paid attention to how the issue is developing in Japan and other Asian countries. As a postgraduate student in Women's Studies who has grown up in a liberal pacifist family, the comfort women issue is a very interesting topic to examine. The issue covers a wide range of topics such as sexism, racism, colonialism and war and sexuality. But at the same time, I have groped for a new approach to the issue. The issue of comfort women has been discussed mainly from the perspectives of historical revisionism, international human rights and women's rights. There is virtually no theoretical or methodological work on representation of this issue that has not been conducted in Japan. Thus, I chose an approach which uses different research methods to analyse historical writings rather than investigating the historical event itself.

This study is a compilation of all three years hard work in Australia. While I have studied Women's Studies at Adelaide University, I have experienced an academic baptism of post-structuralism and post-colonialism. I have studied about Aboliginal history and colonial power relations in Australia. But I feel that I am discussing Australian post-colonialism from an outsider's perspective and somehow feel that I do not digest it competely. However, the comfort women issue offers me an opportunity to apply the anti-colonial and post-structural analysis to an issue closer to my identity and cultural background. The issue made me recognise that there are a lot of potential uses of the knowledge which I have gained from Australian feminism and literary theories. Although I was brought up in a liberal family influence, I have not fully acknowledged the importance of historical revisionism and the non-Japanese side of the history in Japanese colonialism. Korean women historians who use an anti-colonial perspective on the issue have awakened me and given me a broader vision with which to reconsider Japanese historical perspectives and collective memories.

Oral history about and personal narratives of comfort women are rich materials which feed this developing area of inquiry. In my analysis, I employ post-structuralist theories of subjectivity as well as feminism and men's studies (particularly as it exists in America) to explore the experience, gender subjectivities and national and racial subjectivities in personal narratives of ex-comfort women and ex-Japanese soldiers. Through analysing the comfort women issue, I have applied what I have learned within feminist studies in Australia to my area of interest.